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COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
312 ROSA L. PARKS AVENUE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-1102

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Media Contact: Erin Holt, ECD

Office: (615) 532-1925

Email: erin.s.holt@tn.gov

GOVERNOR HASLAM, COMMISSIONER HAGERTY ANNOUNCE MERCHANT HOUSE INTERNATIONAL TO OPEN FIRST U.S. FACILITY IN TENNESSEE

Footwear Manufacturer to Invest \$5.4 Million, Create 109 New Jobs in Jefferson County

NASHVILLE—Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam and Economic and Community Development Commissioner Bill Hagerty, along with officials from the Footwear Division of the Merchant House International Group today announced the company will open its first U.S. footwear manufacturing facility in Jefferson County. The company is moving production of a footwear line from its headquarters in Tianjin, China to Jefferson City due to increased demand from domestic retail customers. Merchant House International will invest \$5.4 million and create 109 new jobs at its new Jefferson City facility.

"I want to welcome Merchant House International to Tennessee and thank them for their investment in Jefferson County," Haslam said. "When a global company chooses to move operations to our state, it speaks volumes about the business environment and the workforce here, and it is another step toward our goal to become the No. 1 state in the Southeast for high quality jobs."

"Merchant House International's decision to move production to Tennessee underscores how more and more global companies are reevaluating the cost effectiveness of manufacturing overseas," Hagerty said. "With the best balance sheet in the country and an advantageous central location, our state is ideally positioned to continue winning international business. I want to thank Merchant House International for bringing high quality manufacturing jobs back to Tennessee."

"We are excited about expanding our international presence and thrilled that's happening in Tennessee," founder of The Merchant House International Group Loretta Lee said. "Jefferson City is an excellent location for our company because it is centrally positioned in the eastern United States, has excellent logistics infrastructure, and a workforce with skills and experience in the apparel industry."

The Footwear Division of the Merchant House International Group has purchased a 40,000 square foot building in the Jefferson City Industrial Park where it plans to manufacture its line of men's leather boots and shoes. The operation, to be known as Footwear Industries of Tennessee, Inc. (FIT), will begin shipping footwear in March 2014.

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"Jefferson City is delighted to welcome The Merchant House International Group," Jefferson City Mayor Mark Potts said. "The citizens of Jefferson County have a work ethic without parallel and they will help to make this company a successful business and a great corporate citizen."

"Recruiting The Merchant House International Group to Jefferson County was a team effort," chair of the Jefferson County Economic Development Oversight Committee Max Fultz said. "I want to thank the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development and Bob Thornton of Baker Realty, the listing agent on the building. We look forward to working with the company's leadership as they hire employees and begin operations."

The company plans to hire 109 employees beginning its first hiring phase at the end of this year. Experienced sewing machinists and material cutters are encouraged to apply for positions by contacting the Tennessee Career Center at Talbott or by visiting www.jobs4tn.gov. The company will also be looking for operators for a state-of-the-art direct injection-molding machine. FIT is setting up a job-training program to support their business launch.

The Footwear Division of The Merchant House International Group was established in 1980. Initially the company specialized in work boots, but in 2003 diversified into American-style western boots. The Division operates two shoe factories and in recent years has added production lines to increase capacity to over five million pairs of shoes annually. The Group manufactures footwear in the Tianjin, China area and has shipped its footwear to the United States for 30 years. It supplies major retail chains like Wal-Mart, Kmart, and Sears and has received "Supplier of the Year" awards on a number of occasions. In addition, it also makes safety and non-safety outdoor shoes for a variety of nationally recognized brands.

About the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development's mission is to develop strategies, which help make Tennessee the No. 1 location in the Southeast for high quality jobs. The department seeks to attract new corporate investment in Tennessee and works with Tennessee companies to facilitate expansion and economic growth. Find us on the web: tn.gov/ecd. Follow us on Twitter: [@tnecd](https://twitter.com/tnecd). Like us on Facebook: facebook.com/tnecd.

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